

FACTS ABOUT THE FLU

Frequently Asked Questions

How much vaccine is expected to be delivered?

Projected distribution of influenza vaccine for 2002-03 based on recent manufacturers' estimates, is 94.0 million doses nationwide. Approximately 80 percent of the total supply should be distributed by the end of October. The Mississippi state Department of Health has ordered 126, 500 doses this flu season.

. Who is considered to be the highest priority for receiving a flu shot?

Those aged 50 years and older;

Nursing home and other chronic-care facility residents;

Adults and children with chronic disorders of the pulmonary and cardiovascular systems, including asthma;

Adults and children who required regular medical follow-up or hospitalization during the preceding year because of chronic metabolic diseases (including diabetes), renal dysfunction or immunosuppression, including that caused by medications or human immunodeficiency virus;

Children and teenagers (aged 6 months--18 years) who receive long-term aspirin therapy; Women who will be in their second or third trimester of pregnancy during the influenza season; and

Health care workers or those in close contact with individuals that comprise high priority populations.

If I am a high-priority person, when and where should I look for a flu shot?

You should first call your family doctor to see when he or she expects to have vaccine. If your doctor does not have the vaccine or is not going to get it, there will be flu shots offered at the local county health department clinics throughout the state during October, November and December. For more information about flu shot clinics in your area, call the Mississippi State Department of Health's Health Info line toll-free, Monday through Friday (8 a.m. – 5 p.m.) at 1-800-489-7670 or visit the Health Department's website: www.msdh.state.ms.us.

If I am a healthy person less than 50 years of age, when should I obtain a flu shot?

It is recommended for those who do not fall into any of the high priority categories to wait until November or later to get a flu shot. By that time, most high-risk persons should be vaccinated. Remember, it only takes two weeks to build immunity after you receive your flu shot.

How is flu vaccine distributed in Mississippi?

A physician or health clinic can order vaccine directly from the manufacturer, from a distributor, or from a pharmacy. Before the vaccine delays last year, there was no prioritization in delivery of vaccine. However, since then, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been encouraging manufacturers and distributors to send first

lots of vaccine to medical providers who serve the high-risk (e.g., doctors, hospitals, nursing homes, health departments) and to send workplace vaccine at a later date.

How long does it take for a flu shot to offer protection?

It takes about two weeks to build the antibodies needed to protect you from the influenza virus.

When is the best time to get vaccinated against flu?

The optimal time is the first of October and before November 30. However, because it only takes about two weeks to build immunity after the shot, and because flu season in Mississippi generally peaks in January and February, it is still beneficial to get vaccinated beyond the November 30th time frame.

How long does protection from a flu shot last?

Less than one year in most people. The influenza virus changes its genetic makeup from year to year, which means that each year you're likely exposed to a new virus. That's why you should get the flu every year, and why a flu shot is recommended every year.

What are complications that can arise from the flu?

Some of the complications caused by the flu include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions such as congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes.

What other precautions can a person take to prevent serious complications from the flu?

Some people are at greater risk from pneumonia than others. These include people 65 and older, the very young, and people with special conditions such as heart or lung disease, diabetes, kidney failure, HIV and certain types of cancer. Those in these categories should check with their health care provider about receiving the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV), which provides increased protection from flu complications. Those receiving PPV can receive an influenza vaccination at the same time.

How is the flu tracked in Mississippi?

The state monitors circulating strains of influenza through cultures tested at the Mississippi State Department of Health's Public Health Laboratory as well as other laboratories throughout the state. Persons with "influenza-like illness" are also monitored in various sites throughout the state. This monitoring begins in October and ends in April (or longer if the influenza season is extended).

Why isn't the flu a reportable condition?

At this time, there is not a way to accurately assess an exact number of influenza cases. In addition, influenza is not nationally reportable. However, it is customary for some state health departments to advise the public through a press release when it receives its first report of a laboratory confirmed flu case as it generally signifies the "official" start of the influenza season.

What else can I do to protect myself from the flu until I get the vaccine?

There are several things you can do: Wash your hands often and keep them out of your mouth; get regular exercise; eat a balanced diet with fruits and vegetables; drink plenty of liquids; and get plenty of sleep. If you are at high-risk for complications from the flu,

make sure you get a pneumonia vaccine and ask your doctor about antiviral medications that can be effective in preventing flu infections.

How can I tell if I have the flu or a cold?

Influenza is spread by airborne droplets through coughing and sneezing, or by direct contact with respiratory secretions. The flu's symptoms come on suddenly and can include a high fever of 101 to 103 degrees Fahrenheit, headache, severe aches and pains, tiredness and weakness, and chest discomfort or coughing. Sometimes it involves a stuffy nose, sneezing, and sore throat. A cold, on the other hand, rarely causes a fever, headache, extreme exhaustion, or aches and pains. Its most prominent symptoms are a stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat and a mild to moderate cough.

Is there anything I can do if I do get the flu?

The same medications that can be used to prevent flu infections (antiviral medications) can also help decrease the length of a flu episode by about one day. Contact your physician at the early onset of flu symptoms to see if you are an appropriate candidate to receive this treatment. For those in generally good health, plenty of bed rest and fluids can be highly beneficial to a speedy recovery.

Can a flu shot give you the flu?

No. Flu vaccines are made from killed influenza viruses. These cannot give you the flu.

How much does a flu shot cost?

The cost of the flu vaccine and getting the vaccine administered will be \$10 this year. The flu shot, as well as the pneumococcal vaccine, are provided by Medicare, Part B.